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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000326

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, IO, IO/T, INL/C/CJ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [AORC](#) [IR](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: COLOMBO PLAN: CONSENSUS MINUS ONE TOWARD THAI  
AMENDMENT PROPOSAL IN WORKING GROUP

REF: A. 04 BANGKOK 8118 (NOTAL)

[B](#). 04 COLOMBO 1597

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. Reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During the February 15 Colombo Plan Working Group meeting, all other member states present expressed their support for the Thai constitutional amendment proposal to address arrears. Among the several concerns voiced about the U.S. proposal, representatives from member states singularly focused on the U.S. language prohibiting a country from having a voice in decision-taking. Despite clarifications and explanations from poloff, member countries remained supportive of the Thai proposal. The meeting concluded with a request to the U.S. from the Working Group Chair to revisit the U.S. proposal in light of the comments expressed during the meeting. Without a revamped U.S. proposal or consideration of a compromise (see Para 8), this issue will remain stalemated. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On February 15, the Colombo Plan Working Group met for the second time to discuss proposals to amend the organization's constitution to address penalties for members states in arrears (see Ref B). Maldivian High Commissioner Mohamed Asif, the current Colombo Plan Council President, chaired the Working Group meeting. In addition to the U.S. presence, representatives from Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand attended.

Concerns regarding the U.S. proposed amendment  
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[1](#)3. (C) The Pakistani representative, who had earlier expressed his support for the U.S. proposal, reversed his support to the Thai proposal. Notably, he agreed that barring citizens from training opportunities because their governments had not paid dues was not just, but felt that the U.S. proposal exceeded the limits of what an organization should be required to do toward the greater good of every member. The Colombo Plan would quickly go bankrupt, he said, if other states stopped paying dues but were still allowed to send citizens to the organization's programs.

[1](#)4. (C) Throughout the meeting, the representatives also focused on allowing consideration for the reasons a member country was in arrears. The Secretary-General said the constitution permitted a member country to apply for a waiver of arrears and highlighted the back dues write-off that was granted to Cambodia. (Note: Chapter VI, Article 6 of the Constitution covers this provision.) He added that Afghanistan was currently in arrears but anticipated that the Council would recognize the country's difficulties in paying dues and agree to writing off that debt. He stressed, however, that Afghanistan had not applied to the Council for such a waiver as of yet. Poloff assured representatives at the Working Group that the U.S. proposal did not supersede the organization's constitutional ability to address extenuating circumstances related to arrears.

[1](#)5. (C) Representatives from almost every member country present remained fixated on the U.S. language that a country would "lose its right to participate in decision-taking" and felt that it violated the consensus spirit of the organization. They also had difficulty deciding how and when a member would be barred from voicing an opinion, especially since the constitution does not allow a country any other status than "member" at Council meetings and there are no formal rules of procedure to reach consensus. (Note: The constitutional reference may be found in Chapter VI, Articles 1 and 14.) Poloff underscored the fact that the U.S. proposal did not intend to bar a member country's participation in Council meetings, but served to prohibit a delinquent member country's voice during moments of decision making as a penalty for arrears.

[1](#)6. (C) Responding to the USG argument that a member country would not be able to sponsor its own citizens for programs if it could not pay its dues, the Secretary-General commented that a member country might only have to pay 1,000 USD for a citizen to attend a Colombo Plan program. In an off-line discussion later recounted to poloff, the Secretary-General said he discussed the issue further with the Thai representative, underscoring that a member country in arrears

would only have to pay the partial cost -- travel and per diem -- for one of its citizens to participate in a Colombo Plan program. If the Thai arrears proposal was accepted by the Council, the Colombo Plan and the host country would still be accountable for the cost of program registration and tuition. Coupled with his earlier comments during the Working Group meeting, the Secretary-General meant to emphasize to poloff that a member country could still afford to sponsor its citizens for a program.

Consensus minus one  
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17. (C) At one point towards the end of the meeting, the Secretary-General asked if there was consensus that the Thai

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proposal could be adopted temporarily while the Secretariat continued to explore alternative ways to address the issue of arrears. In response to poloff's question, the Secretary-General confirmed that, if temporarily adopted, the

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Thai-proposed amendment would go into effect. Poloff replied that the USG could not agree to that. When pressed if the U.S. would agree to let the consensus (every other member present agreed) proceed while noting the U.S.'s objection, poloff responded that, with the U.S. in disagreement, there was no consensus and the USG would not accept the approach put forward. The discussion concluded with chair of the meeting requesting the U.S. to revisit its position in light of the comments expressed by the other member countries. All other representatives present agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Thai proposal be

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adopted immediately -- without the need for another meeting -- should the U.S. change its view. Poloff assured the Working Group that their comments would be conveyed to Washington, but underscored that the current U.S. position had already been the subject of much debate and consideration.

A compromise?  
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18. (C) After the meeting, the Pakistani representative suggested to poloff a possible compromise between the current U.S. and Thai proposals. He proposed that member states in arrears could be allowed to pay for private citizens to attend Colombo Plan programs, but that civil servants would still be barred from participating while the country was in arrears without an amortization plan in effect. In effect, this would address the U.S. concern towards continued citizen participation in Colombo Plan activities, while penalizing the government for its arrears.

Comment  
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19. (C) The member states had cogent arguments in support of the Thai proposal. The representatives also felt that the U.S. and Thai proposals were very similar and many expressed their approval of the amortization option in both suggestions. Moreover, the Secretary-General (a Thai national) has publicly supported the Thai proposal since September 2004 -- when it was introduced at the last Working Group meeting -- calling it "a compromise between the U.S. proposal and the prior proposed amendment." It seems unlikely that he will reverse his personal opinion. U.S. officials have had several lengthy discussions with other member states, many of which privately expressed their concern that the U.S. proposal -- which would not allow delinquent states a voice in decision-taking -- would be akin to "losing face," an unthinkable situation that trumps further consideration of the U.S. approach in this part of the world. Given all these sentiments, suggesting alternatives to the Thai proposal -- see Para 8 -- or developing an entirely new U.S. approach -- not guaranteed of success either -- appear to be the only options for moving forward with this issue. End Comment.

LUNSTEAD